Public Library Website Guidelines

Websites are the electronic front door to your library; as such they deserve the same planning and care that your library receives. Websites are a form of marketing and a way of reaching otherwise unserved customers. A library website can be a vital information resource for your community; capitalize on the opportunity. Bear in mind that a web page is not a website. Displaying the depth of information and resources available at the library requires more than a single page.

The Office of Library and Information Services Local Library Development Team and Web Publishing Team have developed the following basic guidelines for the content and design of public library websites. These guidelines are designed to support libraries in meeting the *Minimum Standards for Rhode Island Public Libraries*. Six of the standards refer directly to information and resources that should be available through a library's website.

Library Home Page

Essential Information	Suggested Information
• Library name, location and phone • Library hours • Link to branch information • Link to catalog • Links to services, programs, calendar, and about the library • Link to site map	• News and events • Link to "support the library", Friends group, or a way to get involved as a library supporter

About the Library

Essential Information	Suggested Information
• Contact information: name, address, phone number, fax number of the library • Branch locations (if any) and contact information for the branches • Library hours	• Annual report • Long-range plan • History of the library • Library newsletter (if any) • Trustee by-laws • Trustee meeting minutes • Volunteer information

About the Library (continued)

Essential Information	Suggested Information
• Key personnel and contact numbers and/or e-mail addresses • Directions to the library • Board of Trustees members • Board of Trustees meeting dates/agenda • Friends group officers, activities, and membership application • Library mission statement • Library policies (especially for library cards, loan periods, use of the meeting room, computer use, unattended children) • Contact Us link and/or virtual suggestion box	• Images of the library

Programs and Services

Essential Information	Suggested Information
• Children's services • YA/Teen services • Literacy services and programs • Disability services • Classes/workshops (if offered) • Museum and park passes • Calendar of events	• New books listing • Staff recommendations listing • Parents section • Teachers section • Seniors section • Adult section

Reference and Research Information

Essential Information	Suggested Information

• Link to library catalog
• Link to CLAN home page
• Electronic resources
• Reference links
• Virtual reference services (email/IM)
• Special collections
• Community links:
  o City/Town government website
  o RI State Government Information (www.info.ri.gov)
  o RI.gov (portal for state government services)
	• Search engines and directories
	• Local history page
	• Genealogy page
	• Connections to other RI libraries, via the LORI Library Directory
	• Statewide Reference Resource Center
	  o Ask a Librarian
	  o Instant Answers

Design Guidelines

- Design by the 10 second rule: a visitor should be able to find a link to your catalog, your locations, your programs, your resources, or your key personnel in less than 10 seconds from any page on your site
- Include the library name on every page (the name should be prominently displayed as a header and included in the <title> tag on the page)
- Include library address, phone, and "contact us" link on every page (possibly as footer if not in header)
- Provide clear and consistent navigation throughout the site; include a link to the library homepage on every page
- Include a site map, and provide a link to it on every page
- Avoid library jargon, e.g., provide a link to the library catalog, not to the OPAC
- Make sure pages load quickly -- limit the use of images and text graphics; compress file sizes for all images
- Avoid flashing objects and multi-colored text that distract a visitor's attention
- Avoid pages longer than 2 screens; users will not scroll down to find information
- Make sure the page is accessible to users with disabilities
  Libraries meet ADA requirements; websites should have a comparable level of accessibility as specified in the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and Federal Section 508 Standards for Electronic and Information Technology
- Check your pages in multiple browsers to be sure they render correctly, e.g., Internet Explorer, Netscape (Mozilla), Firefox, Opera, even on a Mac (Safari)
- Librarians are experts at organizing information; library websites should reflect this!

Web Design Classes

- LORI CE: offers classes in FrontPage (web editing software), provided by Providence Public Library
- Library continuing education programs
- Local colleges: check for course offerings

This document is available online with additional web resources at

http://www.lori.ri.gov/plstandards/websites.php